



## **DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

### **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

#### **50 CFR Part 679**

**[Docket No. 221208-0262; RTID 0648-XC365]**

### **Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands; Proposed 2023 and 2024 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Proposed rule; harvest specifications and request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS proposes 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications, apportionments, and prohibited species catch allowances for the groundfish fisheries of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) management area. This action is necessary to establish harvest limits for groundfish during the 2023 and 2024 fishing years and to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP). The 2023 harvest specifications supersede those previously set in the final 2022 and 2023 harvest specifications, and the 2024 harvest specifications will be superseded in early 2024 when the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications are published. The intended effect of this action is to conserve and manage the groundfish resources in the BSAI in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

**DATES:** Comments must be received by [INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

**ADDRESSES:** Submit your comments, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2022-013, by either of the following methods:

- *Federal e-Rulemaking Portal*: Go to

[www.regulations.gov/#/docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2022-0094](https://www.regulations.gov/#/docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2022-0094), click the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail*: Submit written comments to Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Records Office. Mail comments to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668.

*Instructions*: NMFS may not consider comments if they are sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the comment period ends. All comments received are a part of the public record, and NMFS will post the comments for public viewing on [www.regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender is publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

Electronic copies of the Alaska Groundfish Harvest Specifications Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS), Record of Decision (ROD) for the Final EIS, and the annual Supplementary Information Reports (SIRs) to the Final EIS prepared for this action are available from <https://www.regulations.gov>. An updated 2023 SIR for the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications will be available from the same source. The final 2021 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report for the groundfish resources of the BSAI, dated November 2021, is available from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) at 1007 West 3rd Ave., Suite 400, Anchorage, Alaska 99501, phone 907-271-2809, or from the Council’s website at <https://www.npfmc.org/>. The 2022 SAFE report for the BSAI will be available from the same source.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**: Steve Whitney, 907-586-7228.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Federal regulations at 50 CFR part 679 implement the FMP and govern the groundfish fisheries in the BSAI. The Council prepared the FMP, and NMFS approved it, under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. General regulations governing U.S. fisheries also appear at 50 CFR part 600.

The FMP and its implementing regulations require that NMFS, after consultation with the Council, specify annually the total allowable catch (TAC) for each target species category. The sum of TACs for all groundfish species in the BSAI must be within the optimum yield (OY) range of 1.4 million to 2.0 million metric tons (mt) (see §§ 679.20(a)(1)(i)(A) and 679.20(a)(2)). Section 679.20(c)(1) further requires that NMFS publish proposed harvest specifications in the **Federal Register** and solicit public comments on proposed annual TACs and apportionments thereof; prohibited species catch (PSC) allowances; prohibited species quota (PSQ) reserves established by § 679.21; seasonal allowances of pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel TAC; American Fisheries Act allocations; Amendment 80 allocations; Community Development Quota (CDQ) reserve amounts established by § 679.20(b)(1)(ii); and acceptable biological catch (ABC) surpluses and reserves for CDQ groups and Amendment 80 cooperatives for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. The proposed harvest specifications set forth in Tables 1 through 15 of this action satisfy these requirements.

Under § 679.20(c)(3), NMFS will publish the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications after 1) considering comments received within the comment period (see **DATES**), 2) consulting with the Council at its December 2022 meeting, 3) considering information presented in the 2023 SIR to the Final EIS that assesses the need to prepare a Supplemental EIS (see **ADDRESSES**), and 4) considering information presented in the final 2022 SAFE report prepared for the 2023 and 2024 groundfish fisheries.

**Other Actions Affecting or Potentially Affecting the 2023 and 2024 Harvest Specifications**

### *Halibut Abundance-Based Management for the Amendment 80 Program PSC Limit*

In December 2021, the Council recommended Amendment 123 to the FMP, which if approved would establish abundance-based management of Amendment 80 Program PSC for Pacific halibut. The proposed action would replace the current Amendment 80 sector static halibut PSC limit (1,745 mt) with a process for annually setting the Amendment 80 sector halibut PSC limit based on the most recent halibut abundance estimates from the International Pacific Halibut Commission setline survey index and the NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center Eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey index. The annual process would be based on a table with pre-established halibut abundance ranges from those surveys. The annual Amendment 80 sector halibut PSC limit would be set at the value found at the intercept of the results from the most recent survey indices. Further details will be available on publication of the proposed rule to implement Amendment 123. If the FMP amendment and its implementing regulations are approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the action is anticipated to be effective in 2024. Until effective, NMFS will continue to use the current Amendment 80 halibut PSC limit listed at § 679.21(b)(1) and published in the harvest specifications.

### *Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative Limited Access Privilege Program*

In October 2021, the Council recommended Amendment 122 to the FMP, which if approved would implement a limited access privilege program called the Pacific cod Trawl Cooperative (PCTC) Program. The PCTC Program would allocate quota share (QS) to groundfish License Limitation Program license holders and to processors based on history during the qualifying years. Under this program, QS holders would be required to join cooperatives annually. Cooperatives would be allocated the BSAI trawl catcher vessel sector's A and B season Pacific cod allocations as an exclusive harvest privilege in the form of cooperative quota, equivalent to the aggregate QS of all cooperative members. NMFS anticipates that the regulations at § 679.20(a)(7)(viii) will be removed

through implementation of the PCTC Program, if approved. Further details will be available on publication of the proposed rule to implement Amendment 122. If the FMP amendment and its implementing regulations are approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the action is anticipated to be effective in 2024. Until effective, NMFS will continue the current management of the BSAI trawl catcher vessel Pacific cod allocation.

#### *State of Alaska Guideline Harvest Levels*

For 2023 and 2024, the Board of Fisheries (BOF) for the State of Alaska (State) established the guideline harvest level (GHL) for vessels using pot, longline, jig, and hand troll gear in State waters in the State's Aleutian Islands (AI) State waters sablefish registration area that includes all State waters west of Scotch Cap Light (164° 44.72' W longitude) and south of Cape Sarichef (54° 36' N latitude). The 2023 AI GHL is set at 5 percent of the combined 2023 BS and AI ABC (716 mt). The State's AI sablefish registration area includes areas adjacent to parts of the Federal Bering Sea subarea (BS). Since most of the State's 2023 and 2024 GHL sablefish fishery is expected to occur in State waters adjacent to the BS, the Council and its BSAI Groundfish Plan Team (Plan Team), Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), and Advisory Panel (AP) recommended that the sum of all State and Federal waters sablefish removals from the BS not exceed the proposed ABC recommendations for sablefish in the BS. Accordingly, the Council recommended, and NMFS proposes, that the 2023 and 2024 sablefish TACs in the BS account for the State's GHLs for sablefish caught in State waters.

For 2023 and 2024, the BOF for the State established the GHL for vessels using pot gear in State waters in the BS. The 2022 BS GHL was set at 11 percent of the 2022 BS ABC (87 FR 11626, March 2, 2022). The State's pot gear BS GHL will increase 1 percent annually up to 15 percent of the BS ABC, if at least 90 percent of the GHL is harvested by November 15 of the preceding year. In 2022, 90 percent of the GHL was harvested by November 15, 2022, which triggers a 1 percent increase in the GHL in 2023

and results in a 2023 GHL of 12 percent of the proposed Pacific cod BS ABC. If at least 90 percent of the 2023 BS GHL is not harvested by November 15, 2023, then the 2024 BS GHL will remain at the same percent (12 percent) as the 2023 BS GHL. If 90 percent of the 2023 BS GHL is harvested by November 15, 2023, then the 2024 BS GHL will increase by 1 percent and the 2024 BS TAC will be set to account for the increased BS GHL. Also, for 2023 and 2024, the BOF established an additional GHL for vessels using jig gear in State waters in the BS equal to 45 mt of Pacific cod. The Council and its BSAI Plan Team, SSC, and AP recommended that the sum of all State and Federal waters Pacific cod removals from the BS not exceed the proposed ABC recommendations for Pacific cod in the BS. Accordingly, the Council recommended, and NMFS proposes, that the 2023 and 2024 Pacific cod TACs in the BS account for the State's GHLs for Pacific cod caught in State waters.

For 2023 and 2024, the BOF for the State established the GHL in State waters in the Aleutian Islands subarea (AI). In 2022, 90 percent of the GHL has been harvested by November 15, 2022, and results in a 2023 GHL of 39 percent of the proposed Pacific cod AI ABC. The AI GHL may not exceed 39 percent of the AI ABC or 15 million pounds (6,804 mt). In 2023, 39 percent of the proposed 2023 and 2024 AI ABC is 8,034 mt, which exceeds the AI GHL limit of 6,804 mt. The Council and its Plan Team, SSC, and AP recommended that the sum of all State and Federal waters Pacific cod removals from the AI not exceed the proposed ABC recommendations for Pacific cod in the AI. Accordingly, the Council recommended, and NMFS proposes, that the 2023 and 2024 Pacific cod TACs in the AI account for the State's GHL of 6,804 mt for Pacific cod caught in State waters. This change results in a total TAC for the proposed 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications of 1,999,284 mt.

### **Proposed ABC and TAC Harvest Specifications**

In October 2022, the Council's SSC, its AP, and the Council reviewed the most recent biological and harvest information on the condition of the BSAI groundfish stocks. The Plan Team compiled and presented this information in the final 2021 SAFE report for the BSAI groundfish fisheries, dated November 2021 (see **ADDRESSES**). The final 2022 SAFE report, including individual stock assessments, will be available from the same source (see **ADDRESSES**) and from <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/population-assessments/north-pacific-groundfish-stock-assessment-and-fishery-evaluation>.

The proposed 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications are based on the final 2023 harvest specifications published in March 2022 (87 FR 11626, March 2, 2022), which were set after consideration of the most recent 2021 SAFE report, and are partially updated with initial survey data that were presented at the September 2022 Plan Team meeting. The proposed 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications in this action are subject to change in the final harvest specifications to be published by NMFS following the Council's December 2022 meeting.

In November 2022, the Plan Team will update the 2021 SAFE report to include new information collected during 2022, such as NMFS stock surveys, revised stock assessments, and catch data. The Plan Team will compile this information and present the draft 2022 SAFE report at the December 2022 Council meeting. At that meeting, the SSC and the Council will review the 2022 SAFE report, and the Council will approve the 2022 SAFE report. The Council will consider information in the 2022 SAFE report, recommendations from the November 2022 Plan Team meeting and December 2022 SSC and AP meetings, public testimony, and relevant written comments in making its recommendations for the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications. Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(2) and (3), the Council could recommend adjusting the final TACs if warranted

based on the biological condition of groundfish stocks or a variety of socioeconomic considerations, or if required to cause the sum of TACs to fall within the OY range.

*Expectation for Potential Changes Between What is in These Proposed Specifications and What Will Be in the Final Specifications*

In previous years, the most significant changes (relative to the amount of assessed tonnage of fish) to the Overfishing Levels (OFLs) and ABCs from the proposed to the final harvest specifications have been based on the most recent NMFS stock surveys. These surveys provide updated estimates of stock biomass and spatial distribution, and inform changes to the models or the models' results used for producing stock assessments. Any changes to models used in stock assessments will be recommended by the Plan Team in November 2022, reviewed by the SSC in December 2022, and then included in the final 2022 SAFE report. Model changes can result in changes to final OFLs, ABCs, and TACs. The final 2022 SAFE report will include the most recent information, such as catch data.

The final harvest specification amounts for these stocks are not expected to vary greatly from these proposed harvest specification amounts. If the 2022 SAFE report indicates that the stock biomass trend is increasing for a species, then the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications may reflect an increase from the proposed harvest specifications. Conversely, if the 2022 SAFE report indicates that the stock biomass trend is decreasing for a species, then the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications may reflect a decrease from the proposed harvest specifications. In addition to changes driven by biomass trends, there may be changes in TACs due to the sum of ABCs exceeding 2 million mt. Since the regulations require TACs to be set to an OY between 1.4 and 2 million mt, the Council may be required to recommend TACs that are lower than the ABCs recommended by the Plan Team and the SSC, if setting all TACs equal to ABCs would cause the sum of TACs to exceed an OY of 2 million mt. Generally, total ABCs



greatly exceed 2 million mt in years with a large pollock biomass. For both 2023 and 2024, NMFS anticipates that the sum of the final ABCs will exceed 2 million mt. NMFS expects that the final TACs for the BSAI for both 2023 and 2024 will be close to or equal 2 million mt each year.

The proposed 2023 and 2024 OFLs and ABCs are based on the best available biological and scientific information, including projected biomass trends, information on assumed distribution of stock biomass, and revised technical methods used to calculate stock biomass. The FMP specifies a series of six tiers to define OFLs and ABCs based on the level of reliable information available to fishery scientists. Tier 1 represents the highest level of information quality available, while Tier 6 represents the lowest. The proposed 2023 and 2024 TACs are based on the best available biological and socioeconomic information.

In October 2022, the SSC adopted the proposed 2023 and 2024 OFLs and ABCs recommended by the Plan Team for all groundfish. The Council adopted the SSC's OFL and ABC recommendations. The OFL and ABC amounts are unchanged from the final 2023 harvest specifications published in the **Federal Register** on March 2, 2022 (87 FR 11626). The sum of the proposed 2023 and 2024 ABCs for all assessed groundfish is 2,626,251 mt. The sum of the proposed TACs is 1,999,284 mt.

#### *Specification and Apportionment of TAC Amounts*

The Council recommended proposed 2023 and 2024 TACs that are equal to the proposed ABCs for 2023 and 2024 BS pollock, AI sablefish, BS and AI Greenland turbot, BSAI Kamchatka flounder, Central AI Atka mackerel, BS and Eastern AI Atka mackerel, BS Pacific ocean perch, Central AI Pacific ocean perch, Eastern AI Pacific ocean perch, BS and Eastern AI blackspotted and roughey rockfish, Central AI and Western AI blackspotted and roughey rockfish, BSAI shortraker rockfish, and BS and AI "other rockfish." The Council recommended proposed TACs less than the respective

proposed ABCs for all other species. Section 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(I) requires the AI pollock TAC to be set at 19,000 mt when the AI pollock ABC equals or exceeds 19,000 mt. The Bogoslof pollock TAC is set to accommodate incidental catch amounts. TACs are set so that the sum of the overall TAC does not exceed the BSAI OY.

The proposed groundfish OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are subject to change pending the completion of the final 2022 SAFE report, public comment, and the Council’s recommendations for the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications during its December 2022 meeting. These proposed amounts are consistent with the biological condition of groundfish stocks as described in the 2021 SAFE report. The proposed ABCs reflect harvest amounts that are less than the specified overfishing levels. The proposed TACs have been adjusted for other biological information and socioeconomic considerations, including maintaining the entire TAC within the required OY range. Pursuant to Section 3.2.3.4.1 of the FMP, the Council could recommend adjusting the final TACs “if warranted on the basis of bycatch considerations, management uncertainty, or socioeconomic considerations; or if required in order to cause the sum of the TACs to fall within the OY range.” Table 1 lists the proposed 2023 and 2024 OFL, ABC, TAC, initial TAC (ITAC), and CDQ amounts for groundfish for the BSAI. The proposed apportionment of TAC amounts among fisheries and seasons is discussed below.

**Table 1– Proposed 2023 and 2024 Overfishing Level (OFL), Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Total Allowable Catch (TAC), Initial TAC (ITAC), and CDQ Reserve Allocation of Groundfish in the BSAI<sup>1</sup>**

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Species	Area	Proposed 2023 and 2024					
		OFL	ABC	TAC	ITAC <sup>2</sup>	CDQ <sup>3,4</sup>	Nonspecified Reserves
Pollock <sup>4</sup>	BS	1,704,000	1,289,000	1,289,000	1,160,100	128,900	-
	AI	61,379	50,825	19,000	17,100	1,900	-
	Bogoslof	113,479	85,109	250	250	-	
Pacific cod <sup>5</sup>	BS	180,909	151,709	133,459	119,179	14,280	-
	AI	27,400	20,600	13,796	12,320	1,476	-
Sablefish	Alaska-wide	42,520	36,318	n/a	n/a	n/a	
	BS	n/a	6,529	5,813	2,471	218	218
	AI	n/a	7,786	7,786	1,655	146	146
Yellowfin sole	BSAI	382,035	358,675	230,000	205,390	24,610	-

Greenland turbot	BSAI	6,698	5,724	5,724	4,865	n/a	
	BS	n/a	4,825	4,825	4,101	516	207
	AI	n/a	899	899	764	-	135
Arrowtooth flounder	BSAI	97,944	83,389	20,000	17,000	2,140	860
Kamchatka flounder	BSAI	11,115	9,393	9,393	7,984	-	1,409
Rock sole <sup>6</sup>	BSAI	280,621	271,199	55,000	49,115	5,885	-
Flathead sole <sup>7</sup>	BSAI	80,034	65,988	25,500	22,772	2,729	-
Alaska plaice	BSAI	39,685	32,998	29,082	24,720	-	4,362
Other flatfish <sup>8</sup>	BSAI	22,919	17,189	10,000	8,500	-	1,500
Pacific Ocean perch	BSAI	40,977	34,322	33,952	29,891	n/a	
	BS	n/a	9,956	9,956	8,463	-	1,493
	EAI	n/a	7,774	7,774	6,942	832	-
	CAI	n/a	5,722	5,722	5,110	612	-
	WAI	n/a	10,870	10,500	9,377	1,124	-
Northern rockfish	BSAI	22,594	18,538	17,000	14,450	-	2,550
Blackspotted /Roughye rockfish <sup>9</sup>	BSAI	615	517	517	439	-	78
	BS/EAI	n/a	334	334	284	-	50
	CAI/WAI	n/a	183	183	156	-	27
Shortraker rockfish	BSAI	722	541	541	460	-	81
Other rockfish <sup>10</sup>	BSAI	1,751	1,313	1,313	1,116	-	197
	BS	n/a	919	919	781	-	138
	AI	n/a	394	394	335	-	59
Atka mackerel	BSAI	84,440	71,990	60,958	54,435	6,523	-
	EAI/BS	n/a	25,000	25,000	22,325	2,675	-
	CAI	n/a	15,470	15,470	13,815	1,655	-
	WAI	n/a	31,520	20,488	18,296	2,192	-
Skates	BSAI	46,475	38,824	30,000	25,500	-	4,500
Sharks	BSAI	689	517	500	425	-	75
Octopuses	BSAI	4,769	3,576	700	595	-	105
TOTAL		3,253,770	2,626,251	1,999,284	1,780,731	191,890	17,917

**Note:** Regulatory areas and districts are defined at § 679.2 (BSAI=Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area, BS=Bering Sea subarea, AI=Aleutian Islands subarea, EAI=Eastern Aleutian district, CAI=Central Aleutian district, WAI=Western Aleutian district).

<sup>1</sup> These amounts apply to the entire BSAI management area unless otherwise specified. With the exception of pollock, and for the purpose of these harvest specifications, the Bering Sea subarea (BS) includes the Bogoslof District.

<sup>2</sup> Except for pollock, the portion of the sablefish TAC allocated to hook-and-line and pot gear, and the Amendment 80 species (Atka mackerel, flathead sole, rock sole, yellowfin sole, Pacific cod, and Aleutian Islands Pacific ocean perch), 15 percent of each TAC is put into a nonspecified reserve. The ITAC for these species is the remainder of the TAC after subtraction of the reserves. For pollock and Amendment 80 species, ITAC is the non-CDQ allocation of TAC (see footnote 3 and 4).

<sup>3</sup> For the Amendment 80 species (Atka mackerel, flathead sole, rock sole, yellowfin sole, Pacific cod, and Aleutian Islands Pacific ocean perch), 10.7 percent of the TAC is reserved for use by CDQ participants (see §§ 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) and 679.31). 20 percent of the sablefish TAC allocated to hook-and-line gear or pot gear, 7.5 percent of the sablefish TAC allocated to trawl gear, and 10.7 percent of the TACs for Bering Sea Greenland turbot and BSAI arrowtooth flounder are reserved for use by CDQ participants (see § 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(B) and (D)). The 2024 hook-and-line or pot gear portion of the sablefish ITAC and CDQ reserve will not be specified until the final 2024 and 2025 harvest specifications. Aleutian Islands Greenland turbot, “other flatfish,” Alaska plaice, Bering Sea Pacific ocean perch, Kamchatka flounder, northern rockfish, shortraker rockfish, blackspotted and roughye rockfish, “other rockfish,” skates, sharks, and octopuses are not allocated to the CDQ Program.

<sup>4</sup> Under § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A), the annual BS pollock TAC, after subtracting first for the CDQ directed fishing allowance (10 percent) and second for the incidental catch allowance (4.27 percent), is further allocated by sector for a pollock directed fishery as follows: inshore—50 percent; catcher/processor—40 percent; and motherships—10 percent. Under § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(2), the annual Aleutian Islands (AI) pollock TAC, after subtracting first for the CDQ directed fishing allowance (10 percent) and second for the incidental catch allowance (2,500 mt), is allocated to the Aleut Corporation for a pollock directed fishery.

<sup>5</sup> The proposed BS Pacific cod TAC is set to account for the 12 percent, plus 45 mt, of the BS ABC for the State of Alaska's (State) guideline harvest level in State waters of the BS. The proposed AI Pacific cod TAC is set to account for 39 percent of the AI ABC for the State guideline harvest level in State waters of the AI, unless the State guideline harvest level would exceed 15 million pounds (6,804 mt), in which case the TAC is set to account for the maximum authorized State guideline harvest level of 6,804 mt.

<sup>6</sup> The sablefish OFL and ABC are Alaska-wide and include the Gulf of Alaska.

<sup>7</sup> "Rock sole" includes *Lepidopsetta polyxystra* (Northern rock sole) and *Lepidopsetta bilineata* (Southern rock sole).

<sup>8</sup> "Flathead sole" includes *Hippoglossoides elassodon* (flathead sole) and *Hippoglossoides robustus* (Bering flounder).

<sup>9</sup> "Other flatfish" includes all flatfish species, except for halibut (a prohibited species), Alaska plaice, arrowtooth flounder, flathead sole, Greenland turbot, Kamchatka flounder, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.

<sup>10</sup> "Blackspotted/Rougheye rockfish" includes *Sebastes melanostictus* (blackspotted) and *Sebastes aleutianus* (rougheye).

<sup>11</sup> "Other rockfish" includes all *Sebastes* and *Sebastolobus* species except for dark rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, northern rockfish, blackspotted/rougheye rockfish, and shortraker rockfish.

### *Groundfish Reserves and the Incidental Catch Allowance (ICA) for Pollock, Atka*

#### *Mackerel, Flathead Sole, Rock Sole, Yellowfin Sole, and AI Pacific Ocean Perch*

Section 679.20(b)(1)(i) requires NMFS to reserve 15 percent of the TAC for each target species category (except for pollock, hook-and-line and pot gear allocation of sablefish, and Amendment 80 species) in a nonspecified reserve. Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(B) requires that NMFS allocate 20 percent of the hook-and-line or pot gear allocation of sablefish to the fixed gear sablefish CDQ reserve for each subarea. Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(D) requires that NMFS allocate 7.5 percent of the trawl gear allocation of sablefish and 10.7 percent of BS Greenland turbot and BSAI arrowtooth flounder TACs to the respective CDQ reserves. Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) requires that NMFS allocate 10.7 percent of the TACs for Atka mackerel, AI Pacific ocean perch, yellowfin sole, rock sole, flathead sole, and Pacific cod to the respective CDQ reserves. Sections 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A) and 679.31(a) require allocation of 10 percent of the BS pollock TAC to the pollock CDQ directed fishing allowance (DFA). Sections 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(2)(i) and 679.31(a) require 10 percent of the AI pollock TAC be allocated to the pollock CDQ DFA. The entire Bogoslof District pollock TAC is allocated as an ICA pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(ii) because the Bogoslof District is closed to directed fishing for pollock by regulation (§ 679.22(a)(7)(B)). With the exception of the

hook-and-line or pot gear sablefish CDQ reserve, the regulations do not further apportion the CDQ reserves by gear.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(I), NMFS proposes a pollock ICA of 4.27 percent of the BS pollock TAC after subtracting the 10 percent CDQ DFA. This allowance is based on NMFS's examination of the pollock incidentally retained and discarded catch, including the incidental catch by CDQ vessels, in target fisheries other than pollock from 2000 through 2022. During this 23-year period, the pollock incidental catch ranged from a low of 2.2 percent in 2006 to a high of 4.6 percent in 2014, with a 23-year average of 3 percent. Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(2)(i) and (ii), NMFS proposes a pollock ICA of 15 percent or 2,500 mt of the AI pollock TAC after subtracting the 10 percent CDQ DFA. This allowance is based on NMFS's examination of the pollock incidental catch, including the incidental catch by CDQ vessels, in target fisheries other than pollock from 2003 through 2022. During this 20-year period, the incidental catch of pollock ranged from a low of 5 percent in 2006 to a high of 17 percent in 2014, with a 20-year average of 9 percent.

After subtracting the 10.7 percent CDQ reserve and pursuant to § 679.20(a)(8) and (10), NMFS proposes ICAs of 3,000 mt of flathead sole, 6,000 mt of rock sole, 4,000 mt of yellowfin sole, 10 mt of Western Aleutian District Pacific ocean perch, 60 mt of Central Aleutian District Pacific ocean perch, 100 mt of Eastern Aleutian District Pacific ocean perch, 20 mt of Western Aleutian District Atka mackerel, 75 mt of Central Aleutian District Atka mackerel, and 800 mt of Eastern Aleutian District and BS Atka mackerel. These ICAs are based on NMFS's examination of the incidental catch in other target fisheries from 2003 through 2022.

The regulations do not designate the remainder of the nonspecified reserve by species or species group. Any amount of the reserve may be apportioned to a target species that contributed to the nonspecified reserve during the year, provided that such

apportionments are consistent with § 679.20(a)(3) and do not result in overfishing (see § 679.20(b)(1)(i)). In the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications, NMFS will evaluate whether any apportionments are necessary and may apportion from the nonspecified reserve to increase the ITAC for any target species that contributed to the reserve.

*Allocations of Pollock TAC Under the American Fisheries Act (AFA)*

Section 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A) requires that BS pollock TAC be apportioned as a DFA, after subtracting 10 percent for the CDQ Program and 4.27 percent for the ICA, as follows: 50 percent to the inshore sector, 40 percent to the catcher/processor (CP) sector, and 10 percent to the mothership sector. In the BS, 45 percent of the DFAs are allocated to the A season (January 20 to June 10), and 55 percent of the DFAs are allocated to the B season (June 10 to November 1) (§§ 679.20(a)(5)(i)(B)(1) and 679.23(e)(2)). The AI directed pollock fishery allocation to the Aleut Corporation is the amount of pollock TAC remaining in the AI after subtracting 1,900 mt for the CDQ DFA (10 percent), and 2,500 mt for the ICA (§ 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(2)). In the AI, the total A season apportionment of the pollock TAC (including the AI directed fishery allocation, the CDQ DFA, and the ICA) may not exceed 40 percent of the ABC for AI pollock, and the remainder of the pollock TAC is allocated to the B season (§ 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(3)). Table 2 lists these proposed 2023 and 2024 amounts. Within any fishing year, any under harvest or over harvest of a seasonal allowance may be added to or subtracted from a subsequent seasonal allowance (§§ 679.20(a)(5)(i)(B)(2) and 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(3)(iii)).

Section 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(6) sets harvest limits for pollock in the A season (January 20 to June 10) in Areas 543, 542, and 541. In Area 543, the A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 5 percent of the AI pollock ABC. In Area 542, the A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 15 percent of the AI pollock ABC. In Area 541, the A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 30 percent of the AI pollock ABC.

Section 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(4) includes several specific requirements regarding BS pollock allocations. First, it requires that 8.5 percent of the pollock allocated to the CP sector be available for harvest by AFA catcher vessels (CVs) with CP sector endorsements, unless the Regional Administrator receives a cooperative contract that allows the distribution of harvest among AFA CPs and AFA CVs in a manner agreed to by all members. Second, AFA CPs not listed in the AFA are limited to harvesting no more than 0.5 percent of the pollock allocated to the CP sector. Table 2 lists the proposed 2023 and 2024 allocations of pollock TAC. Tables 13, 14, and 15 list the AFA CP and CV harvesting sideboard limits. The BS inshore pollock cooperative and open access sector allocations are based on the submission of AFA inshore cooperative applications due to NMFS on December 1 of each calendar year. Because AFA inshore cooperative applications for 2023 have not been submitted to NMFS, and NMFS therefore cannot calculate 2023 allocations, NMFS has not included inshore cooperative tables in these proposed harvest specifications. NMFS will post the 2023 AFA inshore pollock cooperative and open access sector allocations on the Alaska Region website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/sustainable-fisheries/alaska-fisheries-management-reports> prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2023, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date.

Table 2 also lists proposed seasonal apportionments of pollock and harvest limits within the Steller Sea Lion Conservation Area (SCA). The harvest of pollock within the SCA, as defined at § 679.22(a)(7)(vii), is limited to no more than 28 percent of the annual pollock DFA before 12 p.m. (noon), April 1, as provided in § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(C). The A season pollock SCA harvest limit will be apportioned to each sector in proportion to each sector's allocated percentage of the DFA.

**Table 2—Proposed 2023 and 2024 Allocations of Pollock TACs to the Directed Pollock Fisheries and to the CDQ Directed Fishing Allowances (DFA)<sup>1</sup>**

[Amounts are in metric tons]			
Area and sector	2023 and 2024	A season <sup>1</sup>	

	Allocations	A season DFA	SCA harvest limit <sup>2</sup>	B season DFA
Bering Sea subarea TAC	1,289,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	128,900	58,005	36,092	70,895
ICA <sup>1</sup>	49,500	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Bering Sea DFA (non-CDQ)	1,110,600	499,770	310,968	610,830
AFA Inshore	555,300	249,885	155,484	305,415
AFA Catcher/Processors <sup>3</sup>	444,240	199,908	124,387	244,332
Catch by CPs	406,480	182,916	n/a	223,564
Catch by CVs <sup>3</sup>	37,760	16,992	n/a	20,768
Unlisted CP Limit <sup>4</sup>	2,221	1,000	n/a	1,222
AFA Motherships	111,060	49,977	31,097	61,083
Excessive Harvesting Limit <sup>5</sup>	194,355	n/a	n/a	n/a
Excessive Processing Limit <sup>6</sup>	333,180	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands subarea ABC	50,825	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands subarea TAC	19,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	1,900	760	n/a	1,140
ICA	2,500	1,250	n/a	1,250
Aleut Corporation	14,600	14,600	n/a	-
Area harvest limit <sup>7</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
541	15,248	n/a	n/a	n/a
542	7,624	n/a	n/a	n/a
543	2,541	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bogoslof District ICA <sup>8</sup>	250	n/a	n/a	n/a

<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A), the annual Bering Sea subarea pollock TAC, after subtracting the CDQ DFA (10 percent) and the ICA (4.27 percent), is allocated as a DFA as follows: inshore sector–50 percent, catcher/processor sector (CPs)–40 percent, and mothership sector–10 percent. In the Bering Sea subarea, 45 percent of the DFAs are allocated to the A season (January 20–June 10) and 55 percent of the DFAs are allocated to the B season (June 10–November 1). Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(2), the annual AI pollock TAC, after subtracting first for the CDQ DFA (10 percent) and second for the ICA (2,500 mt), is allocated to the Aleut Corporation for a directed pollock fishery. In the AI subarea, the A season is allocated no more than 40 percent of the AI pollock ABC.

<sup>2</sup> In the Bering Sea subarea, pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(C), no more than 28 percent of each sector’s annual DFA may be taken from the SCA before noon, April 1.

<sup>3</sup> Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(4), 8.5 percent of the allocation to listed CPs shall be available for harvest only by eligible catcher vessels with a CP endorsement delivering to listed CPs, unless there is a CP sector cooperative for the year.

<sup>4</sup> Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(4)(iii), the AFA unlisted CPs are limited to harvesting no more than 0.5 percent of the C/P sector’s allocation of pollock.

<sup>5</sup> Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(6), NMFS establishes an excessive harvesting share limit equal to 17.5 percent of the sum of the non-CDQ pollock DFAs.

<sup>6</sup> Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(7), NMFS establishes an excessive processing share limit equal to 30 percent of the sum of the non-CDQ pollock DFAs.

<sup>7</sup> Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(6), NMFS establishes harvest limits for pollock in the A season in Area 541 no more than 30 percent, in Area 542 no more than 15 percent, and in Area 543 no more than 5 percent of the Aleutian Islands pollock ABC.

<sup>8</sup> Pursuant to § 679.22(a)(7)(B), the Bogoslof District is closed to directed fishing for pollock. The amounts specified are for incidental catch only and are not apportioned by season or sector.

#### *Allocation of the Atka Mackerel TACs*

Section 679.20(a)(8) allocates the Atka mackerel TACs to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors, after subtracting the CDQ reserves, ICAs for the BSAI trawl limited access sector and non-trawl gear sectors, and the jig gear allocation (Table 3). The percentage of the ITAC for Atka mackerel allocated to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors is listed in Table 33 to 50 CFR part 679 and in § 679.91. Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(8)(i), up to 2 percent of the Eastern Aleutian District and



Bering Sea subarea Atka mackerel TAC may be allocated to vessels using jig gear. The percentage of this allocation is recommended annually by the Council based on several criteria, including the anticipated harvest capacity of the jig gear fleet. The Council recommended, and NMFS proposes, a 0.5 percent allocation of the Atka mackerel TAC in the Eastern Aleutian District and Bering Sea subarea to jig gear in 2023 and 2024.

Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(A) apportions the Atka mackerel TAC into two equal seasonal allowances. Section 679.23(e)(3) sets the first seasonal allowance for directed fishing with trawl gear from January 20 through June 10 (A season), and the second seasonal allowance from June 10 through December 31 (B season). Section 679.23(e)(4)(iii) applies Atka mackerel seasons to trawl CDQ Atka mackerel fishing. Within any fishing year, any under harvest or over harvest of a seasonal allowance may be added to or subtracted from a subsequent seasonal allowance (§ 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(B)). The ICA and jig gear allocations are not apportioned by season.

Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(1)(i) and (ii) limits Atka mackerel catch within waters 0 nautical miles (nmi) to 20 nmi of Steller sea lion sites listed in Table 6 to 50 CFR part 679 and located west of 178° W longitude to no more than 60 percent of the annual TACs in Areas 542 and 543, and equally divides the annual TAC between the A and B seasons as defined at § 679.23(e)(3). Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(2) requires that the annual TAC in Area 543 will be no more than 65 percent of the ABC in Area 543. Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(D) requires that any unharvested Atka mackerel A season allowance that is added to the B season be prohibited from being harvested within waters 0 nm to 20 nmi of Steller sea lion sites listed in Table 6 to 50 CFR part 679 and located in Areas 541, 542, and 543.

Table 3 below lists the proposed 2023 and 2024 Atka mackerel season allowances, area allowances, and the sector allocations. One Amendment 80 cooperative has formed for the 2023 fishing year. Because all Amendment 80 vessels are part of the

cooperative, no allocation to the Amendment 80 limited access sector is required for 2023. The 2024 allocations for Atka mackerel between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2023. NMFS will post the 2024 Amendment 80 cooperatives and Amendment 80 limited access sector allocations on the Alaska Region website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/sustainable-fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-alaska> prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2024, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date.

**Table 3—Proposed 2023 and 2024 Seasonal and Spatial Allowances, Gear Shares, CDQ Reserve, Incidental Catch Allowance (ICA), and Amendment 80 Allocations of the BSAI Atka Mackerel TAC**

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector <sup>1</sup>	Season <sup>2, 3, 4</sup>	2023 and 2024 allocation by area		
		Eastern Aleutian District/Bering Sea	Central Aleutian District <sup>5</sup>	Western Aleutian District <sup>5</sup>
TAC	n/a	25,000	15,470	20,488
CDQ reserve	Total	2,675	1,655	2,192
	A	1,338	828	1,096
	Critical habitat <sup>5</sup>	n/a	497	658
	B	1,338	828	1,096
	Critical habitat <sup>5</sup>	n/a	497	658
non-CDQ TAC	n/a	22,325	13,815	18,296
ICA	Total	800	75	20
Jig <sup>6</sup>	Total	108	-	-
BSAI trawl limited access	Total	2,142	1,374	-
	A	1,071	687	-
	Critical habitat <sup>5</sup>	n/a	412	-
	B	1,071	687	-
	Critical habitat <sup>5</sup>	n/a	412	-
Amendment 80 <sup>7</sup>	Total	19,276	12,366	18,276
	A	9,638	6,183	9,138
	Critical habitat <sup>5</sup>	n/a	3,710	5,483
	B	9,638	6,183	9,138
	Critical habitat <sup>5</sup>	n/a	3,710	5,483

<sup>1</sup> Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii) allocates the Atka mackerel TACs, after subtracting the CDQ reserves, ICAs, and the jig gear allocation, to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors. The allocation of the ITAC for Atka mackerel to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors is established in Table 33 to 50 CFR part 679 and § 679.91. The CDQ reserve is 10.7 percent of the TAC for use by CDQ participants (see §§ 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) and 679.31).

<sup>2</sup> Sections 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(A) and 679.22(a) establish temporal and spatial limitations for the Atka mackerel fishery.

<sup>3</sup> The seasonal allowances of Atka mackerel are 50 percent in the A season and 50 percent in the B season.

<sup>4</sup> Section 679.23(e)(3) authorizes directed fishing for Atka mackerel with trawl gear during the A season from January 20 to June 10, and the B season from June 10 to December 31.

<sup>5</sup> Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(I)(i) limits no more than 60 percent of the annual TACs in Areas 542 and 543 to be caught inside of Steller sea lion protection areas; § 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(I)(ii) equally divides the annual TACs between the A and B seasons as defined at § 679.23(e)(3) and § 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(2) requires that the TAC in Area 543 shall be no more than 65 percent of ABC in Area 543.

<sup>6</sup> Sections 679.2 and 679.20(a)(8)(i) requires that up to 2 percent of the Eastern Aleutian District and Bering Sea subarea TAC be allocated to jig gear after subtraction of the CDQ reserves and ICAs. The proposed amount of this allocation is 0.5 percent. The jig gear allocation is not apportioned by season.

<sup>7</sup> The 2024 allocations for Atka mackerel between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2023.

### *Allocation of the Pacific Cod TAC*

The Council separated BS and AI subarea OFLs, ABCs, and TACs for Pacific cod in 2014 (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014). Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) allocates 10.7 percent of the BS TAC and the AI TAC to the CDQ Program. After CDQ allocations have been deducted from the respective BS and AI Pacific cod TACs, the remaining BS and AI

Pacific cod TACs are combined for calculating further BSAI Pacific cod sector allocations. If the non-CDQ Pacific cod TAC is or will be reached in either the BS or the AI subareas, NMFS will prohibit directed fishing for non-CDQ Pacific cod in that subarea, as provided in § 679.20(d)(1)(iii).

Section 679.20(a)(7)(ii) allocates to the non-CDQ sectors the combined BSAI Pacific cod TAC, after subtracting 10.7 percent for the CDQ Program, as follows: 1.4 percent to vessels using jig gear, 2.0 percent to hook-and-line or pot CVs less than 60 ft (18.3 m) length overall (LOA), 0.2 percent to hook-and-line CVs greater than or equal to 60 ft (18.3 m) LOA, 48.7 percent to hook-and-line CPs, 8.4 percent to pot CVs greater than or equal to 60 ft (18.3 m) LOA, 1.5 percent to pot CPs, 2.3 percent to AFA trawl CPs, 13.4 percent to the Amendment 80 sector, and 22.1 percent to trawl CVs. During the fishing year, NMFS may reallocate unharvested Pacific cod among sectors, consistent with the reallocation hierarchy set forth at § 679.20(a)(7)(iii). The BSAI ICA for the hook-and-line and pot sectors will be deducted from the aggregate portion of BSAI Pacific cod TAC allocated to the hook-and-line and pot sectors. For 2023 and 2024, the Regional Administrator proposes a BSAI ICA of 400 mt, based on anticipated incidental catch by these sectors in other fisheries.

The BSAI ITAC allocation of Pacific cod to the Amendment 80 sector is established in Table 33 to 50 CFR part 679 and § 679.91. One Amendment 80 cooperative has formed for the 2023 fishing year. Because all Amendment 80 vessels are part of the cooperative, no allocation to the Amendment 80 limited access sector is required for 2023. The 2024 allocations for Pacific cod between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2023. NMFS will post the 2024 Amendment 80 cooperatives and Amendment 80 limited access allocations on the Alaska Region website at

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/sustainable-fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-alaska>

prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2024, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date.

The sector allocations of Pacific cod are apportioned into seasonal allowances to disperse the Pacific cod fisheries over the fishing year (see §§ 679.20(a)(7)(i)(B), 679.20(a)(7)(iv)(A), and 679.23(e)(5)). Table 4 lists the non-CDQ sector and seasonal allowances. In accordance with § 679.20(a)(7)(iv)(B) and (C), any unused portion of a non-CDQ Pacific cod seasonal allowance for any sector, except the jig sector, will become available at the beginning of that sector's next seasonal allowance. Section 679.20(a)(7)(i)(B) sets forth the CDQ Pacific cod gear allowances by season, and CDQ groups are prohibited from exceeding those seasonal allowances (§ 679.7(d)(6)).

Section 679.20(a)(7)(vii) requires that the Regional Administrator establish an Area 543 Pacific cod harvest limit based on Pacific cod abundance in Area 543 as determined by the annual stock assessment process. Based on the 2021 stock assessment, the Regional Administrator has preliminarily determined for 2023 and 2024 that the estimated amount of Pacific cod abundance in Area 543 is 15.7 percent of total AI abundance. NMFS will first subtract the State GHL Pacific cod amount from the AI Pacific cod ABC. Then NMFS will determine the harvest limit in Area 543 by multiplying the percentage of Pacific cod estimated in Area 543 (15.7 percent) by the remaining ABC for AI Pacific cod. Based on these calculations, which rely on the 2021 stock assessment, the proposed Area 543 harvest limit is 2,166 mt. However, the final Area 543 harvest limit could change if the Pacific cod abundance in Area 543 changes based on the stock assessment in the final 2022 SAFE report.

On March 21, 2019, the final rule adopting Amendment 113 to the FMP (81 FR 84434, November 23, 2016) was vacated by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (*Groundfish Forum v. Ross*, No. 16-2495 (D.D.C. March 21, 2019)), and the

corresponding regulations implementing Amendment 113 are no longer in effect.

Therefore, this proposed rule is not specifying amounts for the AI Pacific Cod Catcher Vessel Harvest Set-Aside Program (see § 679.20(a)(7)(viii)). NMFS anticipates that in 2024 the regulations at § 679.20(a)(7)(viii) will be removed through implementation of the PCTC Program in a proposed rule to implement Amendment 122, if that action is approved by the Secretary (described above in **Other Actions Affecting or Potentially Affecting the 2023 and 2024 Harvest Specifications**).

Based on the proposed 2023 and 2024 Pacific cod TACs, Table 4 lists the CDQ and non-CDQ TAC amounts; non-CDQ seasonal allowances by gear; the sector allocations of Pacific cod; and the seasons set forth at § 679.23(e)(5).

**Table 4—Proposed 2023 and 2024 Sector Allocations and Seasonal Allowances of the BSAI<sup>1</sup> Pacific Cod TAC**

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector	Percent	2023 and 2024 share of gear sector total	2023 and 2024 share of sector total	2023 and 2024 seasonal apportionment	
				Season	Amount
Total Bering Sea TAC	n/a	133,459	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bering Sea CDQ	n/a	14,280	n/a	See §679.20(a)(7)(i)(B)	n/a
Bering Sea non-CDQ TAC	n/a	119,179	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Aleutian Islands TAC	n/a	13,796	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands CDQ	n/a	1,476	n/a	See §679.20(a)(7)(i)(B)	n/a
Aleutian Islands non-CDQ TAC	n/a	12,320	n/a	n/a	n/a
Western Aleutians Islands Limit	n/a	2,166	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total BSAI non-CDQ TAC <sup>1</sup>	100.0	131,499	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total hook-and-line/pot gear	60.8	79,951	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hook-and-line/pot ICA <sup>2</sup>	n/a	n/a	400	n/a	n/a
Hook-and-line/pot sub-total	n/a	79,551	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hook-and-line catcher/processors	48.7	n/a	63,719	Jan-1-Jun 10	32,497
				Jun 10-Dec 31	31,223
Hook-and-line catcher vessels <sub>≥</sub> 60 ft LOA	0.2	n/a	262	Jan 1-Jun 10	133
				Jun 10-Dec 31	128
Pot catcher/processors	1.5	n/a	1,963	Jan 1-Jun 10	1,001
				Sept 1-Dec 31	962
Pot catcher vessels <sub>≥</sub> 60 ft LOA	8.4	n/a	10,991	Jan 1-Jun 10	5,605
				Sept-1-Dec 31	5,385

Catcher vessels < 60 ft LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear	2.0	n/a	2,617	n/a	n/a
Trawl catcher vessels	22.1	29,061	n/a	Jan 20-Apr 1	21,505
				Apr 1-Jun 10	3,197
				Jun 10-Nov 1	4,359
AFA trawl catcher/processors	2.3	3,024	n/a	Jan 20-Apr 1	2,268
				Apr 1-Jun 10	756
				Jun 10-Nov 1	-
Amendment 80	13.4	17,621	n/a	Jan 20-Apr 1	13,216
				Apr 1-Jun 10	4,405
				Jun 10-Dec 31	-
Jig	1.4	1,841	n/a	Jan 1-Apr 30	1,105
				Apr 30-Aug 31	368
				Aug 31-Dec 31	368

**Note:** Seasonal or sector apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> The sector allocations and seasonal allowances for BSAI Pacific cod TAC are based on the sum of the BS and AI Pacific cod TACs, after subtraction of the reserve for the CDQ Program. If the TAC for Pacific cod in either the BS or AI is or will be reached, then directed fishing will be prohibited for non-CDQ Pacific cod in that subarea, even if a BSAI allowance remains (§ 679.20(d)(1)(iii)).

<sup>2</sup> The ICA for the hook-and-line and pot sectors will be deducted from the aggregate portion of Pacific cod TAC allocated to the hook-and-line and pot sectors. The Regional Administrator proposes an ICA of 400 mt based on anticipated incidental catch by these sectors in other fisheries.

### *Sablefish Gear Allocation*

Section 679.20(a)(4)(iii) and (iv) require allocation of sablefish TAC for the BS and AI between trawl gear and hook-and-line or pot gear. Gear allocations of the sablefish TAC for the BS are 50 percent for trawl gear and 50 percent for hook-and-line or pot gear. Gear allocations of the TAC for the AI are 25 percent for trawl gear and 75 percent for hook-and-line or pot gear. Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(B) requires that NMFS apportion 20 percent of the hook-and-line or pot gear allocation of sablefish TAC to the CDQ reserve for each subarea. Also, § 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(D)(I) requires that 7.5 percent of the trawl gear allocation of sablefish TAC from the nonspecified reserve, established under § 679.20(b)(1)(i), be apportioned to the CDQ reserve. The Council recommended that only trawl sablefish TAC be established biennially. The harvest specifications for the hook-and-line or pot gear sablefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fisheries are limited to the 2023 fishing year to ensure those fisheries are conducted concurrently with the

halibut IFQ fishery. Concurrent sablefish and halibut IFQ fisheries reduce the potential for discards of halibut and sablefish in those fisheries. The sablefish IFQ fisheries remain closed at the beginning of each fishing year until the final harvest specifications for the sablefish IFQ fisheries are in effect. Table 5 lists the proposed 2023 and 2024 gear allocations of the sablefish TAC and CDQ reserve amounts.

**Table 5—Proposed 2023 and 2024 Gear Shares and CDQ Reserve of BSAI Sablefish TACS**

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Subarea and gear	Percent of TAC	2023 Share of TAC	2023 ITAC <sup>1</sup>	2023 CDQ reserve	2024 Share of TAC	2024 ITAC	2024 CDQ reserve
Bering Sea							
Trawl	50	2,907	2,471	218	2,907	2,471	218
Hook-and-line gear/pot <sup>2</sup>	50	2,907	n/a	581	n/a	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	100	5,813	2,471	799	2,907	2,471	218
Aleutian Islands							
Trawl	25	1,947	1,655	146	1,947	1,655	146
Hook-and-line gear/pot <sup>2</sup>	75	5,840	n/a	1,168	n/a	n/a	n/a
TOTAL	100	7,786	1,655	1,314	1,947	1,655	146

**Note:** Seasonal or sector apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> For the sablefish TAC allocated to vessels using trawl gear, 15 percent of TAC is apportioned to the nonspecified reserve (§ 679.20(b)(1)(i)). The ITAC is the remainder of the TAC after the subtraction of this reserve. In the BS and AI, 7.5 percent of the trawl gear allocation of TAC is assigned from the nonspecified reserve to the CDQ reserve (§ 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(D)(I)).

<sup>2</sup> For the sablefish TAC allocated to vessels using hook-and-line or pot gear, 20 percent of the allocated TAC is reserved for use by CDQ participants (§ 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(B)). The Council recommended that specifications for the hook-and-line and pot gear sablefish IFQ fisheries be limited to 1 year.

*Allocation of the AI Pacific Ocean Perch, and BSAI Flathead Sole, Rock Sole, and*

*Yellowfin Sole TACs*

Section 679.20(a)(10)(i) and (ii) require that NMFS allocate AI Pacific ocean perch, and BSAI flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole TACs between the Amendment 80 sector and the BSAI trawl limited access sector, after subtracting 10.7 percent for the CDQ reserves and amounts for ICAs for the BSAI trawl limited access sector and vessels using non-trawl gear. The allocation of the ITAC for AI Pacific ocean perch, and BSAI flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole to the Amendment 80 sector is established in Tables 33 and 34 to 50 CFR part 679 and in § 679.91.



One Amendment 80 cooperative has formed for the 2023 fishing year. Because all Amendment 80 vessels are part of the cooperative, no allocation to the Amendment 80 limited access sector is required for 2023. The 2024 allocations for Amendment 80 species between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2023. NMFS will post the 2024 Amendment 80 cooperatives and Amendment 80 limited access sector allocations on the Alaska Region website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/sustainable-fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-alaska> prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2024, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date. Table 6 lists the proposed 2023 and 2024 allocations of the AI Pacific ocean perch, and BSAI flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole TACs.

**Table 6—Proposed 2023 and 2024 Community Development Quota (CDQ) Reserves, Incidental Catch Amounts (ICAs), and Amendment 80 Allocations of the Aleutian Islands Pacific Ocean Perch, and BSAI Flathead Sole, Rock Sole, and Yellowfin Sole TACs**

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector	2023 and 2024 allocations					
	Pacific ocean perch			Flathead sole	Rock sole	Yellowfin sole
	Eastern Aleutian District	Central Aleutian District	Western Aleutian District	BSAI	BSAI	BSAI
TAC	7774	5722	10,500	25,500	55,000	230,000
CDQ	832	612	1,124	2,729	5,885	24,610
ICA	100	60	10	3,000	6,000	4,000
BSAI trawl limited access sector	684	505	187	-	-	45,498
Amendment 80 <sup>1</sup>	6,158	4,545	9,179	19,772	43,115	155,892

<sup>1</sup>The 2024 allocations between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2023.

Section 679.2 defines the ABC surplus for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole as the difference between the annual ABC and TAC for each species. Section 679.20(b)(1)(iii) establishes ABC reserves for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. The ABC surpluses and the ABC reserves are necessary to mitigate the operational variability, environmental conditions, and economic factors that may constrain the CDQ

groups and the Amendment 80 cooperatives from fully harvesting their allocations and to improve the likelihood of achieving and maintaining, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. NMFS, after consultation with the Council, may set the ABC reserve at or below the ABC surplus for each species, thus maintaining the TAC at or below ABC limits. An amount equal to 10.7 percent of the ABC reserves will be allocated as CDQ ABC reserves for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. Section 679.31(b)(4) establishes the annual allocations of CDQ ABC reserves among the CDQ groups. The Amendment 80 ABC reserves are the ABC reserves minus the CDQ ABC reserves and are allocated to Amendment 80 cooperatives pursuant to § 679.91(i)(2), which establishes each Amendment 80 cooperative ABC reserve to be the ratio of each cooperatives' quota share units and the total Amendment 80 quota share units, multiplied by the Amendment 80 ABC reserve for each respective species. Table 7 lists the proposed 2023 and 2024 ABC surplus and ABC reserves for BSAI flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.

**Table 7—Proposed 2023 and 2024 ABC Surplus, ABC Reserves, Community Development Quota (CDQ) ABC Reserves, and Amendment 80 ABC Reserves in the BSAI for Flathead Sole, Rock Sole, and Yellowfin Sole**

[Amounts are in metric tons]			
Sector	Flathead sole <sup>1</sup>	Rock sole <sup>1</sup>	Yellowfin sole <sup>1</sup>
ABC	65,988	271,199	358,675
TAC	25,500	55,000	230,000
ABC surplus	40,488	216,199	128,675
ABC reserve	40,488	216,199	128,675
CDQ ABC reserve	4,332	23,133	13,768
Amendment 80 ABC reserve	36,156	193,066	114,907

<sup>1</sup>The 2024 allocations between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2023.

#### *Proposed PSC Limits for Halibut, Salmon, Crab, and Herring*

Section 679.21(b), (e), (f), and (g) set forth the BSAI PSC limits. Pursuant to § 679.21(b)(1), the annual BSAI halibut PSC limits total 3,515 mt. Section 679.21(b)(1) allocates 315 mt of the halibut PSC limit as the PSQ reserve for use by the groundfish CDQ Program, 1,745 mt of the halibut PSC limit for the Amendment 80 sector, 745 mt of

the halibut PSC limit for the BSAI trawl limited access sector, and 710 mt of the halibut PSC limit for the BSAI non-trawl sector.

Section 679.21(b)(1)(iii)(A) and (B) require apportionment of the BSAI non-trawl halibut PSC limit into PSC allowances among six fishery categories, and § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(A) and (B), (e)(3)(i)(B), and (e)(3)(iv) require apportionment of the BSAI trawl limited access sector's halibut and crab PSC limits into PSC allowances among seven fishery categories. Table 10 lists the proposed fishery PSC allowances for the BSAI trawl limited access sector fisheries, and Table 11 lists the proposed fishery PSC allowances for the non-trawl fisheries.

Pursuant to Section 3.6 of the FMP, the Council recommends, and NMFS proposes, that certain specified non-trawl fisheries be exempt from the halibut PSC limit. As in past years, after consultation with the Council, NMFS proposes to exempt the pot gear fishery, the jig gear fishery, and the sablefish IFQ hook-and-line gear fishery categories from halibut bycatch restrictions for the following reasons: 1) the pot gear fisheries have low halibut bycatch mortality; 2) NMFS estimates halibut mortality for the jig gear fleet to be negligible because of the small size of the fishery and the selectivity of the gear; and 3) the sablefish and halibut IFQ fisheries have low halibut bycatch mortality because the IFQ Program requires legal-size halibut to be retained by vessels using fixed gear if a halibut IFQ permit holder or a hired master is aboard and is holding unused halibut IFQ for that vessel category and the IFQ regulatory area in which the vessel is operating (§ 679.7(f)(11)).

As of November 9, 2022, total groundfish catch for the pot gear fishery in the BSAI was 21,177 mt, with an associated halibut bycatch mortality of 25 mt. The 2022 jig gear fishery harvested about 0 mt of groundfish. Most vessels in the jig gear fleet are exempt from observer coverage requirements. As a result, observer data are not available on halibut bycatch in the jig gear fishery. As mentioned above, NMFS estimates a

negligible amount of halibut bycatch mortality because of the selective nature of jig gear and the low mortality rate of halibut caught with jig gear and released.

Under § 679.21(f)(2), NMFS annually allocates portions of either 33,318, 45,000, 47,591, or 60,000 Chinook salmon PSC limits among the AFA sectors, depending on past bycatch performance, on whether Chinook salmon bycatch incentive plan agreements (IPAs) are formed, and on whether NMFS determines it is a low Chinook salmon abundance year. NMFS will determine that it is a low Chinook salmon abundance year when abundance of Chinook salmon in western Alaska is less than or equal to 250,000 Chinook salmon. The State provides to NMFS an estimate of Chinook salmon abundance using the 3-System Index for western Alaska, based on the Kuskokwim, Unalakleet, and Upper Yukon aggregate stock grouping.

If an AFA sector participates in an approved IPA and has not exceeded its performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6), and if it is not a low Chinook salmon abundance year, then NMFS will allocate a portion of the 60,000 Chinook salmon PSC limit to that sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(A). If no IPA is approved, or if the sector has exceeded its performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6), and if it is not a low abundance year, then NMFS will allocate a portion of the 47,591 Chinook salmon PSC limit to that sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(C). If an AFA sector participates in an approved IPA and has not exceeded its performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6) in a low abundance year, then NMFS will allocate a portion of the 45,000 Chinook salmon PSC limit to that sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(B). If no IPA is approved, or if the sector has exceeded its performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6), and if in a low abundance year, then NMFS will allocate a portion of the 33,318 Chinook salmon PSC limit to that sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(D).

NMFS has determined that 2022 was a low Chinook salmon abundance year, based on the State's estimate that Chinook salmon abundance in western Alaska is less

than 250,000 Chinook salmon. Therefore, in 2023, the Chinook salmon PSC limit is 45,000 Chinook salmon, allocated to each sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(B). The AFA sector Chinook salmon PSC allocations are also seasonally apportioned with 70 percent of the allocation for the A season pollock fishery, and 30 percent of the allocation for the B season pollock fishery (§§ 679.21(f)(3)(i) and 679.23(e)(2)). In 2023, the Chinook salmon bycatch performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6) is 33,318 Chinook salmon, allocated to each sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(D). NMFS publishes the approved IPAs, allocations, and reports at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/sustainable-fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-alaska>.

Section 679.21(g)(2)(i) specifies 700 fish as the 2023 and 2024 Chinook salmon PSC limit for the AI pollock fishery. Section 679.21(g)(2)(ii) allocates 7.5 percent, or 53 Chinook salmon, as the AI PSQ reserve for the CDQ Program, and allocates the remaining 647 Chinook salmon to the non-CDQ fisheries.

Section 679.21(f)(14)(i) specifies 42,000 fish as the 2023 and 2024 non-Chinook salmon PSC limit for vessels using trawl gear from August 15 through October 14 in the Catcher Vessel Operational Area (CVOA). Section 679.21(f)(14)(ii) allocates 10.7 percent, or 4,494 non-Chinook salmon, in the CVOA as the PSQ reserve for the CDQ Program, and allocates the remaining 37,506 non-Chinook salmon in the CVOA to the non-CDQ fisheries. Section 679.21(f)(14)(iv) exempts from closures in the Chum Salmon Savings Area trawl vessels participating in directed fishing for pollock and operating under an IPA approved by NMFS.

PSC limits for crab and herring are specified annually based on abundance and spawning biomass. Due to the lack of new information as of October 2022 regarding herring PSC limits and apportionments, the Council recommended, and NMFS proposes, basing the proposed 2023 and 2024 herring PSC limits and apportionments on the 2021 survey data. The Council will reconsider these amounts in December 2022. Section

679.21(e)(3)(i)(A)(I) allocates 10.7 percent of each trawl gear PSC limit specified for crab as a PSQ reserve for use by the groundfish CDQ Program.

Based on the most recent (2022) survey data, the red king crab mature female abundance is estimated at 8.004 million red king crabs, and the effective spawning biomass is estimated at 19.607 million lbs (8,894 mt). Based on the criteria set out at § 679.21(e)(1)(i), the proposed 2023 and 2024 PSC limit of red king crab in Zone 1 for trawl gear is 32,000 animals. This limit derives from the mature female abundance estimate, which is below 8.4 million mature red king crab.

Section 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(2) establishes criteria under which NMFS must specify an annual red king crab bycatch limit for the Red King Crab Savings Subarea (RKCSS) if the State has established a GHL fishery for red king crab in the Bristol Bay area in the previous year. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game and NMFS have reviewed the final 2022 NMFS trawl survey data for the Bristol Bay red king crab stock. The stock is estimated to be below the regulatory threshold for opening a fishery. Therefore, the State did not establish a GHL for the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery, and the fishery will remain closed for the 2022/2023 crab season. Since the State did not establish a GHL, NMFS and the Council will not specify an amount of the red king crab bycatch limit, annually established under § 679.21(e)(1)(i), for the RKCSS. Also, NMFS will close directed fishing for groundfish for vessels using non-pelagic trawl gear in the RKCSS for 2023. NMFS and the Council will assess the RKCSS closure for 2024 if the Alaska Department of Fish and Game establishes a GHL for the 2023/2024 red king crab fishery in the Bristol Bay area.

Based on the most recent (2022) survey data from the NMFS annual bottom trawl survey, Tanner crab (*Chionoecetes bairdi*, or *C. bairdi*) abundance is estimated at 381 million animals. Pursuant to criteria set out at § 679.21(e)(1)(ii), the calculated 2023 and 2024 *C. bairdi* crab PSC limit for trawl gear is 830,000 animals in Zone 1, and 2,520,000

animals in Zone 2. The limit in Zone 1 is based on the abundance of *C. bairdi* (estimated at 381 million animals), which is greater than 270 million but less than 400 million animals. The limit in Zone 2 is based on the abundance of *C. bairdi* (estimated at 381 million animals), which is greater than 290 million but less than 400 million animals.

Pursuant to § 679.21(e)(1)(iii), the PSC limit for trawl gear for snow crab (*C. opilio*) is based on total abundance as indicated by the NMFS annual bottom trawl survey. The *C. opilio* crab PSC limit in the *C. opilio* bycatch limitation zone (COBLZ) is set at 0.1133 percent of the Bering Sea abundance index minus 150,000 crabs, unless a minimum or maximum PSC limit applies. Based on the most recent (2022) survey estimate of 2.584 billion animals, the calculated *C. opilio* crab PSC limit is 2,927,672 animals. Because 0.1133 percent multiplied by the total abundance is less than 4.5 million, the minimum PSC limit applies and the PSC limit will be 4.350 million animals.

Pursuant to § 679.21(e)(1)(v), the PSC limit of Pacific herring caught while conducting any trawl operation for BSAI groundfish is 1 percent of the annual eastern Bering Sea herring biomass. The best current estimate of 2023 and 2024 herring biomass is 381,876 mt. This amount was developed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game based on biomass for spawning aggregations. Therefore, the herring PSC limit proposed for 2023 and 2024 is 3,819 mt for all trawl gear as listed in Tables 8 and 9. The Council and NMFS will reconsider the proposed herring PSC limit if updated information on biomass becomes available.

Section 679.21(e)(3)(i)(A) requires that crab PSQ reserves be subtracted from the total trawl PSC limits. The 2023 crab and halibut PSC limits assigned to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors are listed in Table 35 to 50 CFR part 679. The resulting proposed 2023 and 2024 allocations of crab and halibut PSC limits to CDQ PSQ, the Amendment 80 sector, and the BSAI trawl limited access sector are listed in Table 8. Pursuant to §§ 679.21(b)(1)(i), 679.21(e)(3)(vi), and 679.91(d) through (f), crab

and halibut trawl PSC limits assigned to the Amendment 80 sector are then further allocated to Amendment 80 cooperatives as cooperative quotas. Crab and halibut PSC cooperative quotas assigned to Amendment 80 cooperatives are not allocated to specific fishery categories.

One Amendment 80 cooperative has formed for the 2023 fishing year. Because all Amendment 80 vessels are part of the cooperative, no PSC limit allocation to the Amendment 80 limited access sector is required for 2023. The 2024 PSC limit allocations between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2023. NMFS will post the 2024 Amendment 80 cooperatives and Amendment 80 limited access sector allocations on the Alaska Region website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/sustainable-fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-alaska> prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2024, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date.

Section 679.21(b)(2) and (e)(5) authorize NMFS, after consulting with the Council, to establish seasonal apportionments of halibut and crab PSC amounts for the BSAI non-trawl, BSAI trawl limited access, and Amendment 80 limited access sectors to maximize the ability of the fleet to harvest the available groundfish TAC and to minimize bycatch. The factors considered are 1) seasonal distribution of prohibited species, 2) seasonal distribution of target groundfish species relative to prohibited species distribution, 3) prohibited species bycatch needs on a seasonal basis relevant to prohibited species biomass and expected catches of target groundfish species, 4) expected variations in bycatch rates throughout the year, 5) expected changes in directed groundfish fishing seasons, 6) expected start date for the fishing effort, and 7) economic effects of establishing seasonal prohibited species apportionments on segments of the target groundfish industry. Based on these criteria, the Council recommended, and NMFS



proposes, the seasonal PSC apportionments in Tables 10 and 11 to maximize harvest among gear types, fisheries, and seasons, while minimizing bycatch of PSC.

**Table 8—Proposed 2023 and 2024 Apportionment of Prohibited Species Catch Allowances to Non-Trawl Gear, the CDQ Program, Amendment 80, and the BSAI Trawl Limited Access Sectors**

PSC species and area <sup>1</sup>	Total PSC	Non-trawl PSC	CDQ PSQ reserve <sup>2</sup>	Trawl PSC remaining after CDQ PSQ	Amendment 80 sector <sup>3</sup>	BSAI trawl limited access sector	BSAI PSC limits not allocated <sup>2</sup>
Halibut mortality (mt) BSAI	3,515	710	315	n/a	1,745	745	n/a
Herring (mt) BSAI	3,819	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Red king crab (animals) Zone 1	32,000	n/a	3,424	28,576	14,282	8,739	5,555
<i>C. opilio</i> (animals) COBLZ	4,350,000	n/a	465,450	3,884,550	1,909,256	1,248,494	726,799
<i>C. bairdi</i> crab (animals) Zone 1	830,000	n/a	88,810	741,190	312,115	348,285	80,790
<i>C. bairdi</i> crab (animals) Zone 2	2,520,000	n/a	269,640	2,250,360	532,660	1,053,394	664,306

<sup>1</sup> Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of zones.

<sup>2</sup> The CDQ PSQ reserve for crab species is 10.7 percent of each crab PSC limit.

<sup>3</sup> The Amendment 80 program reduced apportionment of the trawl PSC limits for crab below the total PSC limit. These reductions are not apportioned to other gear types or sectors.

**Table 9—Proposed 2023 and 2024 Herring and Red King Crab Savings Subarea (RKCSS) Prohibited Species Catch Allowances for all Trawl Sectors**

Fishery categories	Herring (mt) BSAI	Red king crab (animals) Zone 1
Yellowfin sole	222	n/a
Rock sole/flathead sole/Alaska plaice/other flatfish <sup>1</sup>	110	n/a
Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/Kamchatka flounder/sablefish	11	n/a
Rockfish	11	n/a
Pacific cod	20	n/a
Midwater trawl pollock	2,400	n/a
Pollock/Atka mackerel/other species <sup>2,3</sup>	45	n/a
2023 Red king crab savings subarea non-pelagic trawl gear <sup>4</sup>	n/a	-
2024 Red king crab savings subarea non-pelagic trawl gear <sup>5</sup>	n/a	8,000
Total trawl PSC	3,819	32,000

**Note:** Species apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> “Other flatfish” for PSC monitoring includes all flatfish species, except for halibut (a prohibited species), Alaska plaice, arrowtooth flounder, flathead sole, Greenland turbot, Kamchatka flounder, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.

<sup>2</sup> Pollock other than midwater trawl pollock, Atka mackerel, and “other species” fishery category.

<sup>3</sup> “Other species” for PSC monitoring includes skates, sharks, and octopuses.

<sup>4</sup> Section 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B) establishes criteria under which an annual red king crab bycatch limit must be specified for the Red King Crab Savings Subarea (RKCSS) if the State has established a GHL fishery for red king crab in the Bristol Bay area in the previous year. Based on the final 2022 NMFS trawl survey data for the Bristol Bay red king crab stock, the State of Alaska closed the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery for the 2022/2023 crab season. NMFS and the Council will not specify the red king crab bycatch limit for the RKCSS in 2023, and pursuant to § 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(I) directed fishing for groundfish is prohibited for vessels using non-pelagic trawl gear in the RKCSS for 2023.

<sup>5</sup> If the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery remains closed in the 2023/2024 crab season, the RKCSS specification will be zero. If the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery is open in the 2023/2024 crab season, NMFS, after consultation with the Council, will specify an annual red king crab bycatch limit for the RKCSS, which is limited by regulation to up to 25 percent of the red king crab PSC allowance (§ 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(2)).

**Table 10—Proposed 2023 and 2024 Prohibited Species Bycatch Allowances for the BSAI Trawl Limited Access Sector**

BSAI trawl limited access sector fisheries	Prohibited species and area <sup>1</sup>				
	Halibut mortality (mt) BSAI	Red king crab (animals) Zone 1	<i>C. opilio</i> (animals) COBLZ	<i>C. bairdi</i> (animals)	
				Zone 1	Zone 2
Yellowfin sole	265	7,700	1,192,179	293,234	1,005,879
Rock sole/flathead sole/Alaska plaice/other flatfish <sup>2</sup>	-	-	-	-	-
Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/Kamchatka flounder/sablefish	-	-	-	-	-
Rockfish April 15-December 31	5	-	1,006	-	849
Pacific cod	300	975	50,281	50,816	42,424
Pollock/Atka mackerel/other species <sup>3</sup>	175	65	5,028	4,235	4,243
Total BSAI trawl limited access sector PSC	745	8,739	1,248,494	348,285	1,053,394

**Note:** Species apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of areas and zones.

<sup>2</sup> “Other flatfish” for PSC monitoring includes all flatfish species, except for halibut (a prohibited species), Alaska plaice, arrowtooth flounder, flathead sole, Greenland turbot, Kamchatka flounder, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.

<sup>3</sup> “Other species” for PSC monitoring includes skates, sharks, and octopuses.

**Table 11—proposed 2023 and 2024 Halibut Prohibited Species Bycatch Allowances for Non-Trawl Fisheries**

Halibut mortality (mt) BSAI				
Non-trawl fisheries	Seasons	Catcher/processor	Catcher vessel	All Non-Trawl
Pacific cod	Annual Pacific cod	648	13	661
	January 1-June 10	388	9	n/a
	June 10-August 15	162	2	n/a
	August 15-December 31	98	2	n/a
Non-Pacific cod non-trawl-Total	May 1-December 31	n/a	n/a	49
Groundfish pot and jig	n/a	n/a	n/a	Exempt
Sablefish hook-and-line	n/a	n/a	n/a	Exempt
Total for all non-trawl PSC	n/a	n/a	n/a	710

### *Halibut Discard Mortality Rates*

To monitor halibut bycatch mortality allowances and apportionments, the Regional Administrator uses observed halibut incidental catch rates, halibut discard

mortality rates (DMRs), and estimates of groundfish catch to project when a fishery's halibut bycatch mortality allowance or seasonal apportionment is reached. Halibut incidental catch rates are based on observed estimates of halibut incidental catch in the groundfish fishery. DMRs are estimates of the proportion of incidentally caught halibut that do not survive after being returned to the sea. The cumulative halibut mortality that accrues to a particular halibut PSC limit is the product of a DMR multiplied by the estimated halibut PSC. DMRs are estimated using the best scientific information available in conjunction with the annual BSAI stock assessment process. The DMR methodology and findings are included as an appendix to the annual BSAI groundfish SAFE report.

In 2016, the DMR estimation methodology underwent revisions per the Council's directive. An interagency halibut working group (International Pacific Halibut Commission, Council, and NMFS staff) developed improved estimation methods that have undergone review by the Plan Team, SSC, and the Council. A summary of the revised methodology is included in the BSAI proposed 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications (81 FR 87863, December 6, 2016), and the comprehensive discussion of the working group's statistical methodology is available from the Council (see **ADDRESSES**). The DMR working group's revised methodology is intended to improve estimation accuracy, transparency, and transferability used for calculating DMRs. The working group will continue to consider improvements to the methodology used to calculate halibut mortality, including potential changes to the reference period (the period of data used for calculating the DMRs). Future DMRs may change based on additional years of observer sampling, which could provide more recent and accurate data and which, in turn, could improve the accuracy of estimation and contribute to improvements in methodology. The methodology will continue to ensure that NMFS is using DMRs that more accurately reflect halibut mortality. This is important because the DMRs inform the

different sectors of their estimated halibut mortality and allow specific sectors to respond with methods that could reduce mortality and, eventually, the DMR for that sector.

In October 2022, the Council recommended halibut DMRs derived from the revised methodology for the proposed 2023 and 2024 DMRs. The proposed 2023 and 2024 DMRs use an updated 2-year reference period. Comparing the proposed 2023 and 2024 DMRs to the final DMRs from the 2022 and 2023 harvest specifications, the DMR for pelagic trawl gear remains at 100 percent, the DMR for motherships and CPs using non-pelagic trawl gear increases to 85 percent from 84 percent, the DMR for CVs using non-pelagic trawl gear remains at 62 percent, the DMR for CPs using hook-and-line gear decreases to 9 percent from 10 percent, the DMR for CVs using hook-and-line gear decreases to 9 percent from 10 percent, and the DMR for pot gear decreases to 26 percent from 33 percent. Table 12 lists the proposed 2023 and 2024 DMRs.

**Table 12–Proposed 2023 and 2024 Pacific Halibut Discard Mortality Rates (DMR) for the BSAI**

Gear	Sector	Halibut discard mortality rate (percent)
Pelagic trawl	All	100
Non-pelagic trawl	Mothership and catcher/processor	85
Non-pelagic trawl	Catcher vessel	62
Hook-and-line	Catcher vessel	9
Hook-and-line	Catcher/processor	9
Pot	All	26

*Listed AFA CP Sideboard Limits*

Pursuant to § 679.64(a), the Regional Administrator is responsible for restricting the ability of listed AFA CPs to engage in directed fishing for groundfish species other than pollock to protect participants in other groundfish fisheries from adverse effects resulting from the AFA fishery and from fishery cooperatives in the directed pollock fishery. These restrictions are set out as sideboard limits on catch. On February 8, 2019, NMFS published a final rule (84 FR 2723) that implemented regulations to prohibit non-exempt AFA CPs from directed fishing for all groundfish species or species groups

subject to sideboard limits (see § 679.20(d)(1)(iv)(D) and Table 54 to 50 CFR part 679).

NMFS proposes to exempt AFA CPs from a yellowfin sole sideboard limit pursuant to § 679.64(a)(1)(v) because the proposed 2023 and 2024 aggregate ITAC of yellowfin sole assigned to the Amendment 80 sector and BSAI trawl limited access sector is greater than 125,000 mt.

Section 679.64(a)(2) and Tables 40 and 41 to 50 CFR part 679 establish a formula for calculating PSC sideboard limits for halibut and crab caught by listed AFA CPs. The basis for these sideboard limits is described in detail in the final rules implementing the major provisions of the AFA (67 FR 79692, December 30, 2002) and Amendment 80 (72 FR 52668, September 14, 2007). PSC species listed in Table 13 that are caught by listed AFA CPs participating in any groundfish fishery other than pollock will accrue against the proposed 2023 and 2024 PSC sideboard limits for the listed AFA CPs. Section 679.21(b)(4)(iii), (e)(3)(v), and (e)(7) authorize NMFS to close directed fishing for groundfish other than pollock for listed AFA CPs once a proposed 2023 or 2024 PSC sideboard limit listed in Table 13 is reached. Pursuant to § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(C) and (e)(3)(ii)(C), halibut or crab PSC by listed AFA CPs while fishing for pollock will accrue against the PSC allowances annually specified for the pollock/Atka mackerel/“other species” fishery categories, according to § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(B) and (e)(3)(iv).

**Table 13—Proposed 2023 and 2024 BSAI American Fisheries Act Listed Catcher/Processor (CP) Prohibited Species Sideboard Limits**

PSC species and area <sup>1</sup>	Ratio of PSC to total PSC	Proposed 2023 and 2024 PSC available to trawl vessels after subtraction of PSQ <sup>2</sup>	Proposed 2023 and 2024 CP sideboard limit <sup>2</sup>
BSAI Halibut mortality	n/a	n/a	286
Red king crab Zone 1	0.007	28,576	200
<i>C. opilio</i> (COBLZ)	0.153	3,884,550	594,336
<i>C. bairdi</i> Zone 1	0.140	741,190	103,767
<i>C. bairdi</i> Zone 2	0.050	2,250,360	112,518

<sup>1</sup> Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of areas.

<sup>2</sup> Halibut amounts are in metric tons of halibut mortality. Crab amounts are in numbers of animals.

#### *AFA CV Sideboard Limits*

Pursuant to § 679.64(b), the Regional Administrator is responsible for restricting the ability of listed AFA CVs to engage in directed fishing for groundfish species other than pollock to protect participants in other groundfish fisheries from adverse effects resulting from the AFA and from fishery cooperatives in the pollock directed fishery. These restrictions are set out as sideboard limits on catch. On February 8, 2019, NMFS published a final rule (84 FR 2723) that implemented regulations to prohibit non-exempt AFA CVs from directed fishing for a majority of the groundfish species or species groups subject to sideboard limits (see § 679.20(d)(1)(iv)(D) and Table 55 to 50 CFR part 679). The remainder of the sideboard limits for non-exempt AFA CVs are proposed in Table 14.

Section 679.64(b)(3) and (b)(4) and Tables 40 and 41 to 50 CFR part 679 establish formulas for setting AFA CV groundfish and halibut and crab PSC sideboard limits for the BSAI. The basis for these sideboard limits is described in detail in the final rules implementing the major provisions of the AFA (67 FR 79692, December 30, 2002) and Amendment 80 (72 FR 52668, September 14, 2007). NMFS proposes to exempt AFA CVs from a yellowfin sole sideboard limit pursuant to § 679.64(b)(6) because the proposed 2023 and 2024 aggregate ITAC of yellowfin sole assigned to the Amendment 80 sector and BSAI trawl limited access sector is greater than 125,000 mt. Table 14 lists the proposed 2023 and 2024 AFA CV sideboard limits.

**Table 14—Proposed 2023 and 2024 BSAI Pacific Cod Sideboard Limits for American Fisheries Act Catcher Vessels (CVs)**

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Fishery by area/gear/season	Ratio of 1997 AFA CV catch to TAC	2023 and 2024 initial TAC	2023 and 2024 AFA CV sideboard limits
BSAI	n/a	n/a	n/a
Trawl gear CV	n/a	n/a	n/a
Jan 20-Apr 1	0.8609	21,505	18,514
Apr 1-Jun 10	0.8609	3,197	2,752
Jun 10-Nov 1	0.8609	4,359	3,753

**Note:** As proposed, § 679.64(b)(6) would exempt AFA CVs from a yellowfin sole sideboard limit because the proposed 2023 and 2024 aggregate ITAC of yellowfin sole assigned to the Amendment 80 sector and BSAI trawl limited access sector is greater than 125,000 mt.

Halibut and crab PSC limits listed in Table 15 that are caught by AFA CVs participating in any groundfish fishery other than pollock will accrue against the 2023 and 2024 PSC sideboard limits for the AFA CVs. Section 679.21(b)(4)(iii), (e)(3)(v), and (e)(7) authorize NMFS to close directed fishing for groundfish other than pollock for AFA CVs once a proposed 2023 or 2024 PSC sideboard limit listed in Table 15 is reached. Pursuant to § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(C) and (e)(3)(ii)(C), halibut or crab PSC by AFA CVs while fishing for pollock will accrue against the PSC allowances annually specified for the pollock/Atka mackerel/“other species” fishery categories under § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(B) and (e)(3)(iv).

**Table 15—Proposed 2023 and 2024 American Fisheries Act Catcher Vessel (CV) Prohibited Species Catch Sideboard Limits for the BSAI<sup>1</sup>**

PSC species and area <sup>1</sup>	Target fishery category <sup>2</sup>	AFA CV PSC sideboard limit ratio	Proposed 2023 and 2024 PSC limit after subtraction of PSQ reserves <sup>3</sup>	Proposed 2023 and 2024 AFA CV PSC sideboard limit <sup>3</sup>
Halibut	Pacific cod trawl	n/a	n/a	887
	Pacific cod hook-and-line or pot	n/a	n/a	2
	Yellowfin sole total	n/a	n/a	101
	Rock sole/flathead sole/Alaska plaice/other flatfish <sup>4</sup>	n/a	n/a	228
	Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/Kamchatka flounder/sablefish	n/a	n/a	-
	Rockfish	n/a	n/a	2
	Pollock/Atka mackerel/other species <sup>5</sup>	n/a	n/a	5
Red king crab Zone 1	n/a	0.2990	28,576	8,544
<i>C. opilio</i> COBLZ	n/a	0.1680	3,884,550	652,604
<i>C. bairdi</i> Zone 1	n/a	0.3300	741,190	244,593
<i>C. bairdi</i> Zone 2	n/a	0.1860	2,250,360	418,567

<sup>1</sup> Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of areas.

<sup>2</sup> Target fishery categories are defined at § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(B) and (e)(3)(iv).

<sup>3</sup> Halibut amounts are in metric tons of halibut mortality. Crab amounts are in numbers of animals.

<sup>4</sup> “Other flatfish” for PSC monitoring includes all flatfish species, except for halibut (a prohibited species), Alaska plaice, arrowtooth flounder, flathead sole, Greenland turbot, Kamchatka flounder, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.

<sup>5</sup> “Other species” for PSC monitoring includes skates, sharks, and octopuses.

## Classification

NMFS is issuing this proposed rule pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Through previous actions, the FMP and regulations are designed to authorize NMFS to take this action. See 50 CFR part 679. The NMFS Assistant Administrator has determined that the proposed harvest specifications are consistent with the FMP and preliminarily determined that the proposed harvest specifications are consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable laws, subject to further review after public comment.

This action is authorized under 50 CFR 679.20 and is not subject to review under Executive Order 12866.

NMFS prepared an EIS for the Alaska groundfish harvest specifications and alternative harvest strategies (see **ADDRESSES**) and made it available to the public on January 12, 2007 (72 FR 1512). On February 13, 2007, NMFS issued the ROD for the Final EIS. A SIR is being prepared for the final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications to provide a subsequent assessment of this action and to address the need to prepare a Supplemental EIS (40 CFR 1501.11(b) and 1502.9(d)(1)). Copies of the Final EIS, ROD, and annual SIRs for this action are available from NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**). The Final EIS analyzes the environmental, social, and economic consequences of the proposed groundfish harvest specifications and alternative harvest strategies for resources in the action area. Based on the analysis in the Final EIS, NMFS concluded that the preferred alternative (Alternative 2) provides the best balance among relevant environmental, social, and economic considerations and allows for continued management of the groundfish fisheries based on the most recent, best scientific information.

Adverse impacts on marine mammals or endangered or threatened species resulting from fishing activities conducted under these harvest specifications are discussed in the Final EIS and its accompanying annual SIRs (see **ADDRESSES**).

*Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis*



This Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) was prepared for this proposed rule, as required by Section 603 of the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) (5 U.S.C. 603), to describe the economic impact this proposed rule, if adopted, would have on small entities. This IRFA describes the action; the reasons why this proposed rule is proposed; the objectives and legal basis for this proposed rule; the estimated number and description of directly regulated small entities to which this proposed rule would apply; the recordkeeping, reporting, and other compliance requirements of this proposed rule; and the relevant Federal rules that may duplicate, overlap, or conflict with this proposed rule. This IRFA also describes significant alternatives to this proposed rule that would accomplish the stated objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and any other applicable statutes, and that would minimize any significant economic impact of this proposed rule on small entities. The description of this proposed action, its purpose, and the legal basis are explained earlier in the preamble and are not repeated here.

For RFA purposes only, NMFS has established a small business size standard for businesses, including their affiliates, whose primary industry is commercial fishing (see 50 CFR 200.2). A business primarily engaged in commercial fishing (NAICS code 11411) is classified as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field of operation (including its affiliates), and has combined annual receipts not in excess of \$11 million for all its affiliated operations worldwide. A shoreside processor primarily involved in seafood processing (NAICS code 311710) is classified as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field of operation (including its affiliates), and has combined annual employment, counting all individuals employed on a full-time, part-time, or other basis, not in excess of 750 employees for all its affiliated operations worldwide.

#### *Number and Description of Small Entities Regulated by This Proposed Rule*

The entities directly regulated by the groundfish harvest specifications include: a) entities operating vessels with groundfish Federal fisheries permits (FFPs) catching FMP groundfish in Federal waters (including those receiving direct allocations of groundfish); b) all entities operating vessels, regardless of whether they hold groundfish FFPs, catching FMP groundfish in the State waters parallel fisheries; and c) all entities operating vessels fishing for halibut inside 3 nautical miles of the shore (whether or not they have FFPs). In 2021 (the most recent year of complete data), there were 152 individual CVs and CPs, as well as 6 CDQ groups, all of which had gross revenues less than or equal to \$11 million. This represents the potential suite of directly regulated small entities. This includes an estimated 146 small CV entities and 6 small CP entities remaining in the BSAI groundfish sector. The determination of entity size is based on vessel revenues and affiliated group revenues, as applicable. This determination also includes an assessment of fisheries cooperative affiliations, although actual vessel ownership affiliations have not been completely established. However, this estimate of 146 CVs may be an overstatement of the number of small entities. This latter group of vessels had average gross revenues that varied by gear type. Average gross revenues for hook-and-line CVs, pot gear CVs, and trawl gear CVs are estimated to be \$700,000, \$1.1 million, and \$2.1 million, respectively. Average gross revenues for CP entities are confidential.

#### *Description of Significant Alternatives That Minimize Adverse Impacts on Small Entities*

The action under consideration and contained in this proposed rule is the proposed 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications, apportionments, and prohibited species catch limits for the groundfish fishery of the BSAI. This action is necessary to establish harvest limits for groundfish during the 2023 and 2024 fishing years and is taken in accordance with the FMP prepared by the Council pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The establishment of the proposed harvest specifications is governed by the Council's harvest strategy to

govern the catch of groundfish in the BSAI. This strategy was selected from among five alternatives, with the preferred alternative harvest strategy being one in which the TACs fall within the range of ABCs recommended by the SSC. Under the preferred harvest strategy, TACs are set to a level that falls within the range of ABCs recommended by the SSC; the sum of the TACs must achieve the OY specified in the FMP. While the specific numbers that the harvest strategy produces may vary from year to year, the methodology used for the preferred harvest strategy remains constant.

The TACs associated with the preferred harvest strategy are those recommended by the Council in October 2022. OFLs and ABCs for the species were based on recommendations prepared by the Council's Plan Team in September 2022, and reviewed by the Council's SSC in October 2022. The Council based its TAC recommendations on those of its AP, which were consistent with the SSC's OFL and ABC recommendations. The sum of all TACs remains within the OY for the BSAI consistent with § 679.20(a)(1)(i)(A). Because setting all TACs equal to ABCs would cause the sum of TACs to exceed an OY of 2 million mt, TACs for some species or species groups are lower than the ABCs recommended by the Plan Team and the SSC.

The proposed 2023 and 2024 OFLs and ABCs are based on the best available biological information, including projected biomass trends, information on assumed distribution of stock biomass, and revised technical methods to calculate stock biomass. The proposed 2023 and 2024 TACs are based on the best available biological and socioeconomic information. The proposed 2023 and 2024 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are consistent with the biological condition of groundfish stocks as described in the 2021 SAFE report, which is the most recent, completed SAFE report.

Under this action, the proposed ABCs reflect harvest amounts that are less than the specified overfishing levels. The proposed TACs are within the range of proposed ABCs recommended by the SSC and do not exceed the biological limits recommended

by the SSC (the ABCs and overfishing levels). For some species and species groups in the BSAI, the Council recommended, and NMFS proposes, proposed TACs equal to proposed ABCs, which is intended to maximize harvest opportunities in the BSAI. However, NMFS cannot set TACs for all species in the BSAI equal to their ABCs due to the constraining OY limit of 2 million mt. For this reason, some proposed TACs are less than the proposed ABCs. The specific reductions were reviewed and recommended by the Council's AP, and the Council in turn adopted the AP's TAC recommendations for the proposed 2023 and 2024 TACs.

Based upon the best available scientific data, and in consideration of the Council's objectives of this action, it appears that there are no significant alternatives to the proposed rule that have the potential to accomplish the stated objectives of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and any other applicable statutes and that have the potential to minimize any significant adverse economic impact of the proposed rule on small entities. This action is economically beneficial to entities operating in the BSAI, including small entities. The action proposes TACs for commercially-valuable species in the BSAI and allows for the continued prosecution of the fishery, thereby creating the opportunity for fishery revenue. After public process during which the Council solicited input from stakeholders, the Council concluded that the proposed harvest specifications would best accomplish the stated objectives articulated in the preamble for this proposed rule, and in applicable statutes, and would minimize to the extent practicable adverse economic impacts on the universe of directly regulated small entities.

This action does not modify recordkeeping or reporting requirements, or duplicate, overlap, or conflict with any Federal rules.

This proposed rule contains no information collection requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*; 16 U.S.C. 1540(f); 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*; 16 U.S.C. 3631 *et seq.*; Pub. L. 105–277; Pub. L. 106–31; Pub. L. 106–554; Pub. L. 108–199; Pub. L. 108–447; Pub. L. 109–241; Pub. L. 109–479.

Dated: December 8, 2022.

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